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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S F-TYPE PRISONS: MOVING AWAY FROM "MIDNIGHT EXPRESS"

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A recent Embassy visit to one of Turkey's high-security "F-type" prisons found a clean, modern facility housing inmates who appeared to be well-fed, well-behaved, and well-treated. The prisoners, incarcerated for crimes related to terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, were afforded a number of educational and vocational training opportunities. The prison regime was surprisingly lax by U.S. standards, but appeared to be effective and safe for prisoners and guards alike. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) U.S. Embassy representatives visited Ankara's Sincan prison complex, located approximately 20 kilometers west of central Ankara, on December 2, 2009, to gain a better understanding of the current state of Turkey's prisons, particularly the F-Type prison. The embassy group included the Resident Legal Advisor (RLA), the RLA's assistant, FBI Legal Attache, the Regional Counterterrorism Coordinator and a political officer. A Ministry of Justice official from the Directorate General of Prisons, Orhan Arslan, served as our host.

¶3. (SBU) Turkey's "F-Type" prisons are maximum security facilities used exclusively to house persons convicted of terrorism, organized crime, or leading drug trafficking gangs. The F-type prison concept emerged in 2000, and the first such prisons opened in 2003. There are currently thirteen F-type prisons in Turkey, the last opening in November 2009 on Imrali Island, which houses PKK terrorist leader Abudllah Ocalan and a handful of other prisoners. (Note: The prison on Imrali was described as a "special" F-Type prison because it was created in order to comply with the European Commission Committee for the Prevention of Torture's recommendations to include other prisoners with Ocalan, who had been in solitary confinement since his imprisonment in 1999. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) The Sincan (pronounced "Sin-John") prison complex houses approximately 5,000 prisoners. The complex has two F-type prisons, two L-type prisons (a secure prison for less serious offenders), one women's prison, one juvenile prison, and one "open prison," for the least serious offenders (those with sentences of less than two years or with less than two years remaining on a longer sentence). Each of these prisons is a stand-alone building, and each (except for the open prison) has secure walls surrounded by barb-wire. The complex also has housing for the prison employees and their families, which is separated from the other prison buildings. The exterior wall, consisting of a chain-link fence topped by razor wire, is guarded by the Jandarma (under Ministry of Interior authority), and the interior buildings are guarded by civil servants under the authority of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The prison management personnel are MOJ civil servants. The complex comprises approximately 617

acres and is one of three of its type currently in Turkey (the other two are in the Istanbul area). A total of 15 are planned. Three are currently under construction in Elazig, Erzerum, and Diyarbakir. The tender has been granted for one in Izmir as well.

Sincan's F-type Prisons

15. (SBU) The Sincan F-type prison building we visited (one of two on the grounds) opened in 2003 and has a capacity of 368 prisoners. It currently houses 357 prisoners. The building is constructed in a large rectangular, with long interior corridors running in a crisscross pattern. The prisoners we observed and met appeared well-fed, well-behaved, and well-treated. The prisoners' movement is restricted; they are confined to their cells, and allowed to enter other areas only during specific times of day. Prisoners are granted two hours of exercise each week - one hour inside and one hour outside -- in groups no larger than ten. Prisoners wear regular street clothing, including tennis shoes with shoelaces, something not permitted in U.S. prisons due to the potential for use as a weapon or for suicides. They may not, however, wear clothing of the same color or style as prison guards and staff. Inmates at this prison typically serve sentences of over ten years. The number serving time for terror-related crimes has decreased, while those incarcerated for organized crime has gone up. The facility also houses some incorrigible inmates from other prisons.

16. (SBU) The prison cells themselves are perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the F-type prisons. We observed two types of cells--a single-inmate cell and a three-inmate cell. The three-inmate cell had two levels -- a downstairs living area and an upstairs sleeping area. The lower level, which included a bathroom (with a door for

privacy), had a sink, a kettle for brewing tea, pots, pans, silverware, and a small food pantry above the sink. An interior door opened onto a small enclosed courtyard which the three cellmates used for limited recreation. The cell was clean and well maintained. Meals are delivered to the cells. Remarkably, the cell we visited had three metal spoons, plastic forks, and a small metal knife. (Note: This cutlery would never be permitted in U.S. prisons as each piece could easily be converted into a shank.) This room also had a small sitting area with three plastic chairs, a plastic table, and a small television, provided by the inmates. The upstairs room held three beds, with three small private lockers. The prisoners had prayer rugs, bed linen, and personal items -- one prisoner had a pile of books from the prison library. The cell's upper level was not visible from the prison hallway, and there appeared to be no easy way to see inside this area. A rooftop camera did not have visibility into the upstairs of the cell. The officials explained that this was to respect the inmates' right to privacy. In many ways, the living conditions were not dissimilar from a U.S. college student dorm room.

17. (SBU) The F-type prisoners are afforded a wide range of vocational and educational opportunities. We observed several prisoners making a traditional Turkish stringed instrument (the baglama), finely detailed wooden crafts, mosaic tile-work, and silk screen prints. Prisoners also engage in painting, ceramics, and other artwork. The artistic abilities of the prisoners were impressive. Their artwork is sold to the public, with profits pumped back into buying additional materials for the arts and crafts programs. The prison library, reported to be 10,000 books, appeared well-maintained. Inmates order books from lists provided to each cell.

18. (SBU) Inmates may also pursue an education and earn a high school or college diploma. Their diplomas do not indicate they were earned in prison, so as to not damage future employment opportunities. Prisoners may also continue college programs interrupted by their incarceration by following coursework from the schools they left; they are even accompanied back to their schools by Jandarma to sit for final exams, which must be taken in person. The prison includes a Muslim prayer room and an imam spends ten hours each week at the prison. One guard commented there was also one "Catholic" prisoner for whom a Bible from the library was made available.

19. (SBU) The prisoners may order items from the small prison store, which holds a wide array of snacks, food items, some clothing items,

personal hygiene items, and small televisions. Prisoners select items from a list in their cells and pay from a pre-paid account with a debit card. Prisoners may also, on a weekly basis, receive items delivered from friends and family. The items are examined for contraband in the inmate's presence prior to delivery. Visitation is limited to one hour per week with family members in closed rooms, with an additional one hour per month with family in an open, caf-like visiting area. Prisoners are limited to ten minutes per day of telephone calls to specific, pre-approved numbers.

Open Prison

¶10. (SBU) During a brief visit to the open prison, we found it, too, was remarkable for the breadth of opportunities available to the prisoners. This facility is more like a dormitory, with apparent complete freedom of movement within the building itself. The one cell we observed housed eight prisoners. It was clean and spare, with four bunk beds. Each prisoner had a private locker. The open prison also had classrooms, library, smoking room, prayer room, and hamam (Turkish bath and massage room), which was open from 1700-2200 for the prisoners use.

¶11. (SBU) A large, clean cafeteria, manned by inmates, appeared to offer a wide range of food. The prisoners were able to avail themselves of educational and work opportunities. Prisoners were in the midst of constructing a large outdoor recreation yard, designed by a prisoner who had a background as an architect, which will have a large water fountain and extensive brickwork - all constructed by prisoners. Other prisoners worked in a tree nursery which now has 250,000 trees, with a planned expansion to one million trees. The trees will be sold to the public to earn income for the prison. The prison complex has its own bakery, which is a large, stand-alone building that employs 40 inmates and prepares 14,000 loaves of bread daily. In addition to supplying bread to the Sincan complex, the

bakery also has contracts with outside entities, including the Turkish Central Bank, we were told. The bakery was very clean and had extensive professional-level ovens, mixers, and other heavy-duty bakery equipment.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Overall, the Turkish prison system appears to be moving rapidly away from the stereotypes portrayed in the West. We, of course, cannot be certain that the Sincan prison complex is typical of the newly emerging Turkish prison system. If it is, it is indeed humane and advanced, with conditions superior to many U.S. prisons. We would encourage prison authorities from the United States and other countries to visit these facilities, to benefit from Turkey's experience and to counter the stereotypes of the past.